

Kilkenny People Saturday May 20th

John Dillon speaks in the House of Commons on the Sheehy Skeffington murder

I want to deal very briefly with the case which has been so frequently referred to, the case of Mr. Sheehy Skeffington. It is not only a very bad case, but. it bears very much upon that on which I have laid stress — the prevalence of these horrible rumours in Dublin. I have here—the best thing I can do is to read it out—a very brief narrative which has been given to me by Mr. Sheehy Skeffington's widow, and which. I believe to be absolutely accurate. Here it is:

“Statement of Mr. Sheehy Skeffington's death. On Monday afternoon and Tuesday, April 24 and 25, my husband actually interested himself in helping to repress looting in the city.” I may say that looting was entirely by the mob,, because the rebels or insurgents were absolutely innocent of looting and they fired on the looters more than once. “With some success, enlisting some voluntary helpers for the task. The names and addresses of some of these I can furnish if necessary. On Tuesday he circulated the enclosed poster, the original of which I have, calling a meeting of citizens at 34 Westmoreland street, at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, April 25, for this purpose. I saw him last about 5.15 or 5.30 on that evening, and he stated that he would probably return home shortly. He was seen by two friends subsequently in the neighbourhood of Portobello bridge, between 6.30 and 7 p.m. Mr. C. Redmond states that he spoke to him at McCartney's (newsagent) in Richmond street and that he went on towards the bridge, that shortly after (about ten minutes) he saw a crowd on the bridge, who said that Sheehy Skeffington was arrested. He was unarmed and unresisting and had never used arms. He was seen removed in custody to Portobello Barracks where he was shot that 'night or early next morning, Wednesday, April 26, and buried shortly after. No priest was sent for, a chaplain being summoned only to read the funeral service. Rumours reached me that my husband was arrested and shot, but I did not receive, and I have not yet received, any definite notification of his death. On Thursday,

April 27th, Mrs. Kettle (my sister), wife of an officer, and Mrs. Culhane, another sister, wife of the late J. S. Culhane, called, on advice of the Rathmines Police, at Portobello Barracks, to inquire about my husband. All information was refused and they themselves were put under temporary arrest, a formal inquiry being held, and they were released subsequently on producing papers of identification, etc. On Friday night, April 28th, shortly after seven, my house in 11 Grosvenor place, Rathmines one of a terrace, was surrounded by military (about 60 to 100 in number). They fired the first shot at the window in the front without any warning and burst on the house that night. On Monday, May 1st, some soldiers again raided the house during my absence, this time apparently looking for Sinn Feiners, for they took nothing. They took in charge a temporary maid I had (my own maid having been too terrified to stay with me), took her in custody and brought her to the police station and kept her there until the following Saturday, May 6th, without any charge being made against her. At length, through the police, she was released. I have laid these facts before Sir John Maxwell, who has also been approached by m husband's father.” Mrs. Skeffington

begs me, in conclusion, to ask the Government and the House of Commons for a public investigation. I may read the circular which was found on Mr. Skeffington when he was arrested:

"When there are no regular police in the streets it becomes the duty of civilians to police the streets themselves to prevent the spasmodic looting that has taken place. Civilians, men and women, who are willing to partake in this, are asked to attend at Westmoreland Chambers, at 5 o'clock this afternoon. (Signed), F. Sheehy Skeffington."

That was the only incriminating document which appears to have been found upon him. I make this appeal to the Government. I do not want to embitter this matter by any charges against officers. I do not wish to mention any names, but I think the Prime Minister will readily admit that nothing but a public inquiry is demanded as a matter of elementary justice to this unhappy lady for this cruel injury which has been inflicted upon her. To tell us that there will be a courtmartial which, of course, would be secret, and that we may be sure justice will be done, is really an outrage upon every principle of fair play. We, I think, have a right, we who speak for the vast majority of the Irish people as we do, we who have risked a great deal to win the people to your side in this great crisis of your Empire's history, we who have endeavoured to secure that the Irish in America shall not go into alliance with the Germans in that country; we, I think, were entitled to be consulted before this bloody course of execution was entered upon in Ireland. God knows the result of flouting our advice as it has been flouted in the conduct of Irish affairs ever since the Coalition Government was formed, has not been a brilliant one. If there be a case of coldblooded murder, by all means try the man openly before a courtmartial if you like, but let the public know what the evidence is, and prove that he is a murderer and then do what you like with him. But it is not murderers who are being executed? It is insurgents who have fought a clean fight, a brave fight, however misguided, and it would be a damned good thing for you if your soldiers were able to put up as good a fight as did these men in Dublin—three thousand men against twenty thousand with machine guns and artillery.